

**Lister Sinclair**

Good evening and welcome to *Ideas*. I'm Lister Sinclair with Part Eleven of David Cayley's series "The Education Debates." The first nine broadcasts in the series took place last September. The final six had to be postponed and are being presented this week and next week.

Our subject in this episode is multiculturalism and the questions it raises for public education. In recent years, multiculturalism has been the rationale for a movement to broaden the curriculum of education and diversify the character of public schools. Supporters of this movement have argued that the existing curriculum is a deposit of racism, colonialism and patriarchy and must be overhauled. Opponents have criticized the movement for creating a culture of complaint and for breaking education up into non-communicating enclaves, like Black Studies, Native Studies, Women's Studies and so on. Tonight, we look into some of these questions. The program begins with philosopher Charles Taylor's argument that multiculturalism, or what he calls the politics of recognition, is an inescapable part of contemporary existence. This leads to the question of whether demands for recognition mandate more inclusive common schools or separate schools for separate groups. We look at both sides of the question, beginning with the case of state funding of private religious schools and concluding with a teacher who introduced courses in Black History at his Scarborough, Ontario, high school. "The Education Debates," Part Eleven, by David Cayley.

**David Cayley**

Public education in Canada was founded on the idea of the common school. At the very inception of Upper Canada's school system in the 1840s, its architect, Egerton Ryerson, spoke feelingly of "the children of the rich and the poor imbibing the first elements of knowledge at the same fountain and commencing the race of life upon equal terms." In practice, the well-off rarely attended public schools, but Ryerson's ideal persisted and gradually drew most of the population into a common system of education with a common curriculum. Underlying this system was an assumption that students shared a common culture, a common religious heritage and a common sense of where each fit in the social order. In the writing of Ryerson's I just quoted, for example, he goes on to say that the mutual respect and sympathy he hoped the common school would engender between classes should "in no respect intrude upon the providential arrangements of order and rank in society, but only divest poverty of its meanness and wealth of its arrogance." Schooling involved socialization into an assumed and, if necessary, imposed consensus. This consensus no longer exists. Canada was declared an officially multicultural society by the Trudeau government in 1971. Various court decisions have since deprived Christianity of any official or privileged position in the public schools. Native people have reclaimed the standing of distinct aboriginal nations with rights of self-government including control over their own education. Many other groups have also demanded recognition and some sort of special status. Deep and seemingly unbridgeable gulfs have opened between citizens on moral questions like abortion or the right of gays to marry and rear children. In the 1995 Egan case, for example, in which a majority of the Supreme Court broadened the definition of family to include homosexual unions, a broad coalition of Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, told the court that their traditions stood unalterably opposed to the idea. Abortion polarizes opinion in a similarly fundamental way.

This new pluralistic society in which people are defined by their differences is the site of what Charles Taylor calls "the politics of recognition". The implications for education are profound and I'll come to them presently. But first, I want to explore what Taylor means more generally by this expression. He argues, first of all, that the problem is characteristically modern. In pre-modern societies, he says, people conducted most of their significant social relations within their own enclaves. Relations with outsiders

were rigidly prescribed and raised no question of recognition or identity. Signs of a change in this view began to appear in the 18th century with the writings of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

### Charles Taylor

You see, what this issue of recognition can be understood as is a new modern twist on the issue of honour and dignity and possible dishonour and so on. And what you have in Rousseau is a new position on that. You either had people beforehand who thought that honour and dignity were important and they had an ethic where someone should live up to their honour code. Or you had a very powerful tradition, which you have in Plato, and you have in Augustinian Christianity, which says this honour stuff is pride, it's bad, negative, you shouldn't think about that. Putting your life into that is completely the wrong thing. You should scrap it. It's a tremendous anti-honour polemic. Now, Rousseau comes along with a new position which is a kind of marriage of these two views. He very strongly draws on the critique of the honour ethic in order to say that people who are concerned with how they look in the eyes of others have completely missed the boat. The Stoics said this and he exactly reproduces this critique of the honour ethic. But just when you think you're on familiar ground, if you're a reader of the Stoics, you think okay, he's going to say forget all this, set it aside; then he suddenly switches and he proposes a new solution which we would today call a mutual recognition in total equality. What's wrong with honour, it turns out, is that it is always hierarchically and unequally distributed. What's wrong with the search for honour is that it is normally seen as a desire to have everyone to depend on me, and to free me from dependence on anyone else. The way out is to have absolute equality, or, identity of the honourer and the honouree, and Rousseau thinks we can only do this socially. So he develops these very powerful requirements on a just society which have been haunting us ever since. According to him there are a series of very important relationships that are crucial to both power and honour that will have to be reorganized so that there is an identity between the terms on both sides of the relationship. So, there can't any longer be a king who's sovereign over people but it's got to be the whole people who are sovereign over the whole people. You can't have any different relationship to power between A and B because that will break with the requirement of equality. And he has this same requirement in the display of ourselves to ourselves. In hierarchical societies, the king makes a progress and all attention focuses on him. We all look at a Princess Di, et cetera. But, in Rousseau's view, the great popular festival must be the whole people parading before or enjoying itself, before the whole people. The spectators and spectated have to be rigorously the same. That's why he's terribly against theatre. Same thing, because there you have some people on stage and some people in the dark, not expressing themselves, but simply looking at the people on the stage. This ideal was taken up by the French Revolutionaries. You see it in the design of all those feasts that they tried to put together in the 1790s, desperately trying to create the new political culture in France. They had read Rousseau and they actually picked up on that. Many of the people who designed those festivals said we're meeting this requirement. So all the revolutionary festivals had the whole public parading before itself, as it were. Everybody was involved in the parade on the feast day. Now here you have a theory in which what we would call today being recognized, being acknowledged, is not forgotten. You still have, in Rousseau, this tremendous polemic against honour, as in the Stoics, but it's not just in order to say forget that, just think about your own conscience or think about your own inner self. Instead the question of honour is transposed into an issue of whether it's radically reciprocal, egalitarian, everybody on the same footing or whether it has this terrible vice of inequality, of dependence of some on others, and that becomes the new issue. And in a sense, that was the birth point, theoretically, of this modern concern.

### David Cayley

Rousseau's solution to the problem of honour led in time to the unstable politics of recognition that we

know today. His intention was to protect the unique, inward identity of each individual from a distorting dependence on the opinions of others. But his proposal moved towards an equality so absolute that it threatened all differences. This was the tendency that was manifest in the Jacobins of the French Revolution and that has continued, Taylor says, to this day.

### Charles Taylor

If we all had the same identity, this problem wouldn't arise. It's only because there are these differences that they can be misrecognized. That's why the Jacobins were, in a way, on to something. Not that it would ever work, but they did see that the nature of modern egalitarian society is such that it would obviously run a lot better if everybody defined themselves, let's say, purely as a citizen of the French Republic, in which they were like everybody else, and, if they took anything that differentiated them, like their religion or their region and so on, and they put it into a second category of less important stuff. Then the modern problems of recognition wouldn't exist. That's why there has been this constant temptation--moves are constantly made on the political checkerboard--to get this problem off the table by making everybody the same, or getting everybody to agree that, for political purposes, what ought to be important to them in their identity is only X. And that the things that are different ought to be put in a second category, where they don't count and they don't need to impinge on the political scene. So people will say that all you really need as a citizen is that you are a bearer of certain rights. The Canadian charter, for example, gives you your rights. That's what should matter to you as a citizen. So what's all this business about you wanting to be French or English or whatever? Take that off the table. There are an awful lot of moves of this kind which are part of the whole game and struggle about identity. What these moves amount to is the statement, I recognize your identity, but don't ask me to recognize your difference. Ask me only to recognize the way in which you're the same as me and then there'll be no problem. This is a response to the intuition people have that, in a way, it would all go much easier, if we could just set our differences aside. Only that's too much to ask of certain people.

### David Cayley

But there's also an opposite movement, which is the flight into difference--you can't understand me, you can't write from my point of view, however it's expressed.

### Charles Taylor

Yes, and that's a very tempting move in cases of really tough sledding with identity recognition, which is for groups to say, we don't need this. We need to be recognized by somebody, but we don't need you to recognize us any more. We're declaring our independence, as it were, from you as an interlocutor. And we have to be clear that human beings need certain interlocutors, and not others, in crucial identity modes. For example, if a kid's growing up in a family where there are big problems about his or her being accepted, it may not help if some totally unrelated person says--it may, but it may not--"I understand you." What that kid may really need is recognition by what Mead called "significant others"--maybe the parents, or at least some narrower group. So it's clear that, when we need recognition, very often we need it from certain people and not from others. A modern citizen of democracy has the ideology that everybody's in it together, we're all in it together. So it tends to be the case that in such a society we need recognition from our compatriots. But then you get the move you see among, for instance, certain African Americans of saying about the white citizens, no, we don't need it from you, or the move that says, even further, that it's an act of aggression on your part to try to understand us because only we can understand ourselves and don't even make the attempt. But in fact, a lot of this "you can't understand us" is a move in a continuing game, of getting recognition. So there's something not entirely up front about it. In other words, it's still an attempt to grab the attention, to lay guilt on the

other that's involved in making these moves. So it's a profoundly other-referring move even while it pretends to be a completely other-cutting-off move. That's why I call it bad faith. There's a real conflict between the actual human meaning of the move and the overt claim.

**David Cayley**

In Charles Taylor's view, tension between identity and difference is inherent in the very existence of citizen democracies. Citizens share a collective identity, yet remain profoundly and irreducibly different. Taylor sees this as a situation requiring dialogue, accommodation and a willingness to live in a variegated, asymmetrical world that cannot be neatly resolved into universal categories or mapped onto a uniform Cartesian grid. But Canada's case shows how difficult it can be to achieve this kind of accommodation in practice. The attempt to work something out, he says, is always menaced by the desire for logical, clear-cut solutions.

**Charles Taylor**

You have various people that don't accept the requirement to work something out. They're uneasy with differences and the only general solution they will accept is the uniformizing, Jacobin one, really. So they have great trouble with the ad hoc solutions, and there's going to be a certain ad hockery in working out just how we can co-exist with and what kinds of recognition between ourselves. Can we actually find a terrain where we can feel together on this? It's going to vary from country to country, it's not going to be based on universal principles, it's going to be messy, it's going to be illogical, it's going to be historically conditioned and so on. And there are people who find this extremely hard to take, people whose idea of a properly running society is one in which fundamentally there's this uniformity which dominates. In Canada it comes in two flavours. There's the Quebec separatist, one which is very, very Jacobin in all its fibres. And there's the rest of Canada, refusing of Quebec's difference, which is much more hooked into an Anglo Saxon tradition. And the existence of the country is constantly in peril because when these two forces together get strong enough to strangle the middle, as it were, the existence of the country is always on the edge of the precipice.

**David Cayley**

The spirit of improvisation that Taylor thinks would preserve Canada without destroying its difference should, in his view, also guide the revision of the curriculum of education. The curriculum, he believes, should certainly be broadened to include previously excluded groups and stories. But this should be done only as it becomes possible to do it well, and not according to some mechanical, prefabricated notion of equality.

**Charles Taylor**

The desire to apply universal principles of fairness really gets in the way here, because if you start to think in terms of what's just and right and decide you've got to tell all the stories or none, then that's almost always going to end up pushing you towards a very watered down curriculum in which a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of the other gets a look in, but nobody gets really fired up with something in one or other of these great traditions so that it really means something to you and you can take it and either read further or write further or whatever. It isn't going to answer this requirement if you have a tiny bit of the I Ching and two pages of aboriginal myth and one half of a sonnet by Shakespeare and so on, because then nobody has a chance to get fired up by anything at all. And here I would lean very far on one side. In other words, if your resources only allow you to go very deeply into Shakespeare and not very much else, then don't sacrifice going deeply into Shakespeare just because at the moment you can't provide similar coverage to everything. It's very, very important that people really get sufficient

exposure to particular subjects. On the other hand, we now can move in a multicultural direction more effectively. I am familiar with the university level, and because we do have people who are really very well versed with some of these other cultural traditions, who are pedagogically very alive, who can get them across in a very powerful way and meet the requirement I'm asking for, that the subject be taught in a lively enough way with enough depth and breadth that there's some hope that people can actually pick up on something. And we can make a plan in the university steadily to increase this element, as long as we aren't hamstrung by the idea that unless we do it all, you know, this year we're somehow not meeting some requirement of justice or fairness.

### **David Cayley**

Taylor's idea that new courses of study should be introduced only when they can be taught passionately and in depth reflects his general approach to the politics of recognition. Circumstances modify principles. There is no one right way or single universal answer. Respect for difference demands variation. Common interests demand common institutions. The proper balance between the two has to be discovered on a case-by-case basis. Taylor takes the same approach to the question of whether ethnic or religious schools should receive public funding and support.

### **Charles Taylor**

Here again we have one of these standing dilemmas. We have to find some place in the middle or some place that maximizes. This is no doubt that, on one hand, there are real advantages to having schools in which everybody's mixed in. You know, it's quite impressive in Montreal now with Bill 101, which has put all these immigrant children into French-speaking schools together with, you know, Quebecois *pur laine*, old stock Quebecers. This situation has changed all the players --the old stock Quebecers as well as the others. It's been very important to their forming friendships and achieving understanding. So that's a real example where there's a real advantage to having everybody in the same school. However, it's also important that different groups can feel that their identities are really being listened to, carried over and so on, as they define them, and this is going to mean that for some groups it's going to be very important to have their own schools. And I can't see that one of these principles is pre-eminent over the other and that you can just, in virtue of the nature of democracy or whatever, decide from the beginning that we're going to take one of these (let's say the common school) and that therefore, any request for a Jewish school or a Catholic school, whatever, is just not receivable. So we have to find a way of allowing that possibility, even though I think, ideally, we should try to find a way of encouraging as many as possible to be in a common school. But people have to be persuaded to that. In other words, we have to distinguish in democracy between goals, even very good goals, to which people have to be persuaded to adhere, and if they can't be, then so be it, and other things like paying your income tax where no one's going to ever ask you your opinion, you've just got to do it. Now, I think that when you have things like paying income tax, on which the whole society depends, or even conscription, in certain cases, in war, then you have a case for making this mandatory. But when you have goals that take the form of statements beginning "we'd have in some ways a better society if..." "it would be good if..." and so on, then you actually defeat your purpose by compulsion ... because very often the goodness of those conditions depends on their being voluntarily agreed to. I think there you undercut the very point of the operation if you begin to make those things mandatory. So the fact that, in some ways, it would be good if we all were in a common school system is not a good ground to say to people, no, you cannot have your own school.

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**David Cayley**

Charles Taylor argues that the questions raised by multiculturalism demand a dialogue and a dialogue, by definition, is an encounter whose outcome cannot be predicted. He accepts that recognition is a real need whose absence can inflict real harm, but he doesn't think that any set of universal principles can settle the practical questions that are entailed in trying to address this harm. Sometimes the answer may lie in the direction of more inclusive common institutions and sometimes in the direction of separate institutions for separate groups. Accordingly, in what follows, I want to look at both cases, beginning with the argument for public support for groups that want their own schools.

For nearly 15 years, the Canadian Jewish Congress has been campaigning for state support for private Jewish schools in Ontario. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec now grant partial aid to private religious schools but Ontario, excepting Roman Catholic schools, does not. In the early 1980s, when the government of Bill Davis extended funding for Catholic schools to Grade XIII—it had previously stopped at high school—it put the question of support for other private schools to a commission headed by Bernard Shapiro, now the Principal of McGill University. He recommended that such funding be given, by granting private schools associate status within public boards. The government shelved the report. The succeeding Liberal government procrastinated. Then the NDP took power in the early 90s. They, at least, were frank in saying that they would never fund private schools. So the Canadian Jewish Congress, along with the Alliance of Christian Schools, went to court to test the constitutionality of a system that gave public support to Roman Catholic schools, but to no other denomination or religion. The Supreme Court, where the case ended, answered, equivocally, in November of 1996. Nothing prevents the Ontario government from funding private schools, the court said, but current Catholic education rights in Ontario do not constitute unfair discrimination, it went on, because they are part of the political deal that created Confederation and not an instance of a universal right. Bernie Farber is with the Ontario Section of the Canadian Jewish Congress and has been involved in the question of government funding for Jewish schools for many years. He thinks that the Supreme Court took too narrow a view of minority rights within Confederation.

**Bernie Farber**

When the Fathers of Confederation were carving out this wonderful deal that became Canada, and they were looking at minority versus majority rights, there were about 150 Jews in the province of Ontario and very few other minorities in the province of Ontario. The minority was the French-speaking Roman Catholic population. I would like to think that the Fathers of Confederation were far-sighted, as opposed to the government of today. I think what they were looking at was ensuring that minority rights be protected forever in Ontario and in Quebec. So, if one extends their principle, today the protected minorities would have to include Jews and Muslims and other religious groups. And it is for that reason that we believe these rights should have been extended to these groups. However, the bottom line is they were not. The Supreme Court of Canada said that Ontario was correct in its interpretation that it did not have to fund independent schools, based on the fact that they're funding Catholic schools, but—and it's a very important but, because it brings us all the way back to 1984 again—they said that, in fact, it's a political decision and if the government wishes to, as a political decision, it certainly can fund independent schools. And so here we are, 15 years later, having to dance the political dance with the present Conservative government. And it's 'déjà vu' all over again.

**David Cayley**

The main argument of the Canadian Jewish Congress and its partners in their case to the Supreme Court was fairness, or equal recognition, in the terms Charles Taylor used earlier. Jewish schools follow the

Ontario curriculum and operate within the province's civic traditions. So how can it be right, Bernie Farber asks, to fund one kind of religious school and not another?

**Bernie Farber**

We live in an area that's relatively multicultural, north Toronto. On either side of me live two Catholic families, and we get along exceedingly well. However, my neighbour on the right side has children who are of school age and their children go to the Roman Catholic school literally right around the corner. A school bus picks them up, and takes them to the Roman Catholic school. They don't pay a cent. And I don't begrudge them that. I think it's marvellous. If we wanted to send our children to a Jewish day school, we would have to arrange for bus transportation, we would have to pay tuition of approximately \$7,000 per child. And I look at this and I think to myself, am I any less a citizen than my next-door neighbour? Why is it that my next door neighbour has this right to educate his children in his faith, paid for by the government, but I, a Canadian citizen, who pays the same taxes as he does, contributes in the same way to society as he does, do not have that right? That's something we tried to impress upon the courts. The courts, in my experience, are not passionate in their approach. They don't look inside of people's heads. They don't look inside of people's hearts. They're just looking at the strict application and interpretation of the law. But what they're missing is this issue of fairness, of equity. I am as equal a citizen as anybody else and I don't have the same rights. It just comes down to that.

**David Cayley**

Why are parents sending their children to Jewish schools?

**Bernie Farber**

Generally speaking, within the Jewish tradition, there has been this historical understanding of the need for continuity. Continuity within Judaism is something that has been literally inbred into our minds from day one. And there's a history behind it. There's been no other people on the face of this earth that historically have been challenged, as the Jewish people have. In this century alone there was an attempt to wipe out Judaism as a living, breathing tradition, and it almost succeeded. And so, as Emile Fackenheim, a very famous modern-day Jewish philosopher, once said, there is an Eleventh Commandment in Judaism. And that is, never to give Hitler a posthumous victory by walking away from your Judaism. And the position that many Jews take is that in order to imbue their children with all that Jewish life is about, they have to be taught the precepts of the Torah, and they have to be taught the Hebrew language. There is an atmosphere of Judaism which can be inculcated only in a full school environment. We are, after all, historically the People of the Book. That's what Jews are. And so for those modern Jewish families who sincerely believe in that, of which there are many, the Jewish day school system is the only way to accomplish this end. There's also another reason, especially for those who are on the Orthodox end of things, the modern day Orthodox. There are Jewish holy days, for example, which can number up to 16 in any current school year. There are laws, specific laws centering around what can be eaten and it's just not viable for these Orthodox children to be going to a public school which cannot meet their basic religious needs, around food and holy days and that kind of thing. So at the extreme end of things ... you have those families. But the vast majority of Jewish families that send their children to Jewish day schools fit into a modern look at Judaism. They have an honest desire to have their children brought up Jewishly.

We have developed what I call myths and assumptions when it comes to the whole issue of the funding of independent schools. It's a myth, for example, that if we separate our children into denominational schools, in fact, we're doing them a disservice because we're separating them and then they don't get

to really play a part in the everyday public life of what is Canada. Well, this is nonsense. It's complete nonsense. I know of dozens and dozens of my own contemporaries who went to Jewish day schools who are today doctors and lawyers and engineers and architects who contribute to the public good. My own children, and the children they play with on our own street, many of them go to all kinds of different schools, be they Catholic schools, private schools, public schools. But they come home and they play together in the back yard and they go out to the park on a Sunday and it doesn't matter if they're black or white or Catholic or Jewish or Muslim. They can go to their separate schools, but they come back together and they still have to live within an environment, live within the community. So this idea just doesn't wash with me. It's one of those arguments that those who are against the funding of independent schools consistently put forward, and it doesn't work. They also put forward the myth of the destruction of the public school system, if you fund independent schools. Well, I say give me the proof. The proof, for me, is in the pudding, and the pudding in Canada is the fact that provinces in this country already fund independent schools. Is the public school system in Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia is it falling apart? Of course not. Quite the contrary. In B.C. there was a report just last year from the public school system praising the funding of independent schools because it says it offers a challenge to the public schools. There hasn't been this dispersion of children from the public school into the separate or private school as a result of funding in other provinces. It just has not happened. Why would it happen here?

### **David Cayley**

Those who oppose public funding of religious schools often argue, as Bernie Farber just noted, that separate schooling undermines citizenship by depriving students of a core of common experiences. Farber believes, on the contrary, that a solid grounding in one's own tradition often augments citizenship rather than diminishing it.

### **Bernie Farber**

When you have a better sense of where you've come from, I really believe you know and you have a better sense of where you're going to. Isn't believing in what you are what Canada's all about? It's an experiment and maybe our great-great-great-grandchildren will be able to make an assessment of whether it will work. I believe it will work. In the wonderful multicultural experiment which is this country one can be Jewish and Canadian, one can be Muslim and Canadian, Italian and Canadian at the same time, not in a melting pot kind of an atmosphere as we have in the United States, but celebrating both. And it can work. You know, my father was a very devout Jew, but when he came to this country, he flew that Union Jack in front of our house, you know, every Victoria Day. He was proud to be a citizen of this country. I remember how, as a child, we used to travel by train to the United States and when we came to the border crossings, my father always had to show what he called his "citizenship" papers, his citizenship papers. And he would pull them out and he would proudly show them to the border people, whoever they were, and then he would sit and he would show them to me again, and every time we went, he would say, you see, I'm a Canadian. But he wasn't any less Jewish. So, this is the wonderful experiment that we're engaged in. And it's quite right that a young child should be brought up within his own religious tradition or ethnic tradition and understand what that's about. I don't want to say this makes a better citizen, but it certainly makes as good a citizen as anyone who goes to a public school system, if not better.

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### **David Cayley**

Multiculturalism, as Charles Taylor argued earlier, mandates a stance, a presumption that other cultures are as worthy as our own, but not a definite policy. Those who take this stance generally agree that public education should be more variegated and more attentive to cultural differences, but there is deep disagreement about whether this requirement is best met by expanding public support for separate schools or by making the common schools more diverse. You've just heard Bernie Farber's argument that religious schools, operating within the same academic and civic framework as public schools, deserve public support. In the final section of tonight's program, you'll hear an argument for a broadening of the curriculum in the public schools. The two positions contrast, but don't necessarily contradict each other, at least if one heeds Taylor's opinion that multiculturalism is not a question with only one right answer. Bob Davis is the author of a number of books on education, including What Our High Schools Could Be, Whatever Happened to High School History?, and the forthcoming Mentally Skilled But Mindless: Skills Mania in our High Schools. From 1975 until his retirement a few years ago, he taught history at Stephen Leacock Collegiate, a Scarborough, Ontario, high school. While he was there, the racial composition of the student body changed rapidly, and by the early '90s a school that had once been nearly all white was 13% black. Davis responded by introducing two courses on black history, one on Africa and the West Indies, one on the black experience in Canada and the United States since slavery. Both were part of the school's top level academic program. They were open to all--Davis himself is white--but were taken mainly by black students. Opponents of multiculturalism have sometimes argued that diversifying the curriculum promotes separateness and retards integration into Canadian society, but Davis believes that the courses he taught had the opposite effect on his students.

### **Bob Davis**

I think it made them more at home in our school, not less at home. They feel, now we have a little corner in our education here for our own history, which has been left out in a serious way, we are more at home here and we don't have to just be at home on the basketball court. And we don't just have to be at home producing a fashion show, or a talent show. We're in the academic program. And it's very important for them that it be academic. I inherited a situation where students felt they were given a kind of bull session black history. And I've heard of some schools where they talk about sports and rap the whole time. It's a disgusting lowering of sights. It's the same when it's just in the general level program and not the academic program. These are very serious courses with lots of reading and lots of hard studying. You're expected to be there and be on time. That's another whole story I could tell you. I got a number of parents' meetings going and for one of them I went out and knocked on about 60 doors. And so, contrary to the conventional wisdom, that the blacks won't come to parents' nights, we had a huge meeting, with nearly a hundred people. A discussion about attendance and punctuality came up. I said, on average the attendance of your kids and their punctuality is worse than the rest of the students. Why is that? And I told them that the teachers say that when they talk to your kids they get attitude, and they argue. And the parents said, that's outrageous, we didn't hear about this. Call us up, are they, scared of them? Tell our kids, don't give me that nonsense. Get here on time. But the kids say the teachers are afraid of them. This is one of the good things that happens when there is an advocate, as I was, in doing black history. You get a cross-fertilization and there is discussion about how blacks are seen by the other teachers. And I think the students were right that this arguing tendency scared a lot of teachers and they gave up reminding them to be there on time. Later, we had a speaker called Akua Benjamin from Ryerson who said, if we're going to talk about the relation of black kids to the police, we have to talk about how our kids talk back. And she said, if we didn't talk back, we'd still be slaves. So that's one of the good things that resulted, I felt, was this kind of ferment about who are they, how are they being treated. And I saw this particularly in their student organization. In most schools, it tended to be to organize a fashion show and in our school there was a huge emphasis on bringing in educational

speakers. And they would get quite an attendance of white kids, too. And so I thought, no, people are wrong. It's the opposite. These students now feel more at home. Most of their time is still spent in the melting pot, and that assimilation to Canadian society is essential, but they had that piece of education which offered a security and knowledge that they wouldn't have gotten without it.

**David Cayley**

At the end of the second year of black history at Stephen Leacock, students wrote personal or family histories. Bob Davis collected and published their essays, along with photographs and illustrations, in a series of handsomely designed books called Our Roots.

**Bob Davis**

I put the stress on their own personal histories. It started to become popular with some teachers to get them to talk to their parents and their relatives. And that's very good, I think. And I would say about half of my students took up that challenge. But I said the bottom line is your own story. They had just spent time reading Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and Malcolm X's autobiography. So when I pointed this out, they said, well my life's very boring compared to theirs. So at the start the technique was a little bit inhibiting. But in the long run it became inspiring. And it's quite remarkable, I think, what they wrote. In that sense I'm an incurable progressive in that I think self knowledge is really, really important and I think the left has often been as bad as the right in ignoring that, and concentrating on principles and things outside yourself.

**David Cayley**

Tell me a little bit more what you mean by self-knowledge.

**Bob Davis**

Well, students would say my life is boring. But then you need to spend some time with them and ask questions. Where have you lived? Then you find that they emigrated from Jamaica when they were 13. You say, my God, that doesn't sound boring to me. How was it? Terrible. It was really terrible. Is that right? After a while, you get to see there's a whole lot in this person's life that is very important, but they have never, to use a Hegelian expression, taken it up into consciousness. They have never reflected on, hey, I have had some rough challenges there to deal with and it wasn't just that we got into terrible clashes at home. There's a great novel by Cecil Foster about a mother who comes to Toronto ahead of time, ahead of her child, and the child is, as I remember, quite tiny, but by the time she's ready, with the cash together that she wanted to get together to bring her child up, the kid's a teenager. And it's rough. It's very rough. Well, there's quite a lot of kids in that bracket here who have had that history. But not many people, especially not many people try to get them to think of it in connection with education. To put it to a teacher or to put it to yourself in writing seems to me to be a very noble aim of education. There was a British school of elementary education that espoused getting beyond the "My Summer Vacation" and "My Dog Spot" compositions that kids did and going for something deeper. There was a great flood of wonderful writing in the sixties when people caught on to this, teachers caught on to it. But it never seemed to hit the high schools much. It was thought to be a little kid's enterprise, you know, until we got serious in high school and we got specializing and I just think that's wrong. I think it should be there in high school, too.

**David Cayley**

Bob Davis regards the black history program at Stephen Leacock as proof that education works best when it takes account of who the student is and incorporates that person's self discovery into its

curriculum. But he says that, despite the program having been such a success, the principle of multicultural education is still contested and its future not assured.

### Bob Davis

We had quite a battle about getting a proper teacher to replace me who could do those courses and was interested in those programs. Because there are no specialty requirements in the agreement negotiated by the teacher union and the board about this as a specialty. It's too small at the moment to have that.

And none of the existing history department felt they were qualified to do it. There were a couple of people in English who, I thought, might be able to but they didn't feel they were qualified. So they started searching. And it got to the point where we had to have another parents' meeting and get really serious.

And the Principal came and he went out and found somebody who's carried on the program. It's still very vigorous now. I think the general tendency at the moment is to shrink such programs, but new ones are starting as well, so I don't know whether one can say for sure at this point, which way things are going.

### David Cayley

Davis's supposition that multicultural education may now be shrinking is based, first of all, on the current ascendancy of a reform movement that is more interested in restoring education's common core than expanding its margins, and, second, on the success of the recent counter attacks that have been made against multiculturalism. Amongst the most celebrated of these attacks have been Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society, and in Canada Neil Bissoondath's well-reviewed The Selling of Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada. Both of these books have argued that cultural recognition is a contrived need, that the preservation and celebration of immigrant or minority cultures is a private affair that should not concern public institutions, and finally, that failure to assimilate everyone to a common culture will produce a petulant and fragmentary society. Davis, obviously, disagrees. He doesn't disparage assimilation or deny that education should foster a common ethos. Rather, he believes that people's real contribution to society comes through an achieved understanding of who they are and where they've come from. Cultural identity and participation in civic life, on this view, are harmonious rather than antagonistic ends. Like Bernie Farber, he upholds the image of Canada as a cultural mosaic, rather than a melting pot, as the United States is said to be. But Davis wonders, finally, whether this idea is now sufficiently appreciated.

### Bob Davis

What is wrong, except that, I guess, it was never practised, with the mosaic? Now, we used to think it was practised, people like me, right? We thought Canada was a mosaic. And Canada is different in some ways, but those who have been treated badly say, hey, hey, that's a big joke. It was a melting pot here, too. But it's the ideal that I'm talking about, that underlies my work. I mean, take my students. They were taking one class out of four per day in black history. The other three were totally mainstream and if you can consider that over the four years, if they took two years of black history then it's a very small percentage of their total education that was strictly on black matters. And so I think we have to try to do both. And the idea that you could be a proud African-Canadian or a proud Italian-Canadian to me is still a very sacred idea. And its sacredness means something if it is supported by our corporate group through our corporate taxes. We're not going to tell people how to celebrate, you know, Italian holidays. That's in their own families. But in something as important as schooling, I don't really think they can learn properly without these things in the curriculum.

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